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Microsoft names new Windows version Vista

Microsoft has finally given an official name to the next version of Windows, previously known by its codename Longhorn. The company spent eight months running market research and analysing focus groups before deciding on the name Windows Vista.

Microsoft said it chose the name because it "captures the idea of clarity". Some less kind observers have pointed out that the dictionary definition of a vista as "a view seen through a long narrow opening" conveys the number of times the product's release date has receded into the distance. Microsoft first showed off the new features that it planned for this version of Windows in 2003, and promised that it would ship what was then known as Longhorn some time in 2004.

Microsoft's decision to name its software and announce a first beta for developers, which shipped in August, was welcomed as a sign that the final release date of late 2006 was accurate. However, a more widely released public beta is also promised for early next year, so 2007 is the earliest that the product will appear. In addition, a server version of Windows Vista will appear in the first half of 2007.



Microsoft has set up a new website at www.microsoft.com/windowsvista as part of what will inevitably be an enormous marketing campaign for the first major Windows release for five years.

Windows still accounts for one-third of Microsoft's sales revenues, and the company has experienced problems in persuading its enormous army of customers to upgrade from older versions of the operating system. This is particularly true

in the business market. The day before Microsoft announced Vista the company reported that sales had grown just eight per cent for the financial quarter that ended on 30th June. This is well below the company's characteristic double-digit growth.

Microsoft plans to use the Vista name to highlight ways in which the operating system's built-in search engine can present views of data that was once hard to locate. Virtual folders can provide views of files and data according to criteria such as 'created this week' or 'emails from Paul'.

Microsoft is also emphasising the fact that Vista will come with improved security built in at system level; secure startup that stops someone who has stolen your PC from accessing your data; a flashier interface that apes some of Mac OS X's look and feel; easier and more powerful network configuration; and features such as parental controls.

However, persuading customers to upgrade to Vista won't be made easier by the fact that a number of features have been jettisoned since the early demonstrations of Longhorn. The new WinFS file system, which was once considered a key part of a powerful system-level search, will be missing.

Time runs out for UK PC manufacturer

The future of two of the UK's best-known PC brands, Time and Tiny, was still hanging in the balance as *Computer Shopper* went to press. In late July, the parent company Granville Technology Group went into administration.

"The Group has fallen victim to the continued price deflation in the personal computer market," said a spokesperson for financial and business advisor Grant Thornton UK, which is handling the administration. Granville is thought to have debts of over £50 million, owed largely to its bank HSBC and GE Capital, which operated financing deals for its customers.

As *Shopper* went to press all 78 of Granville's Computer Shop stores had been closed, and workers at its factory in Burnley had been laid off after not having been paid for over a week. Granville was the largest British PC maker, producing around 500,000 computers a year. There are around two million Tiny and Time-branded PCs in UK homes, businesses, schools, colleges and universities.

Granville has struggled since its 2002 acquisition of Tiny Computers, which was then in administration having gone bust with debts exceeding £35 million. The combined group, which included 143 Tiny retail stores, then found itself overstretched with more

than 290 stores across the UK. Despite cutting down its retail exposure and selling more PCs through outlets such as Tesco, Asda and Woolworths, the group has struggled during the ruthless PC price wars of the past few years.

The administrators have set aside funds to cover existing customers' warranties, though on a limited basis, and customer support. This will remain in place while the company's fate is decided.

Customers with queries should address them to enquiries-time@gtuk.com, and those without access to email can call the Time customer/creditor support phone line on 08708 303288.



EC investigators raid Intel offices

Intel offices in England, Italy, Germany and Spain have been subjected to a morning of coordinated dawn raids by European Commission investigators. In July the teams searched for evidence that the chip giant has abused its market position to exclude AMD unfairly from selling to PC vendors.

The investigators from the EC's competition directorate also raided the offices of half a dozen PC makers, including Dell. Alone among the top manufacturers, Dell has never offered AMD processors in any of its PC lines.

"Competition officials, accompanied by officials from national competition authorities, are conducting inspections of several premises of Intel in Europe as well as a number of IT firms manufacturing or selling computers," Jonathan Todd, a European Union spokesman, told Reuters.

"The investigations are being carried out within the framework of an ongoing competition case," he

added. In 2000 the EC started what is now a five-year investigation into allegations by AMD that Intel unfairly pressurised PC vendors not to use AMD chips in their PCs.

The EC's original investigation seemed to have gone off the boil when, in 2002, the commission declared that AMD's claims were "not founded". However, the case was never officially closed. Then, in 2004, AMD made another complaint to the EC and introduced what it claimed was new evidence of a "relentless, worldwide campaign" by Intel to damage its business.

According to industry insiders, the fact that the EC responded with something as dramatic as dawn raids is a sure sign that it intends to proceed with some kind of action against Intel. An official EC indictment, known as a Statement of Objections, is expected before the end of this year.

The EC's raids follow a March ruling by Japan's Fair Trade Commission (JFTC), which found that Intel had violated its antitrust

regulations. Intel agreed to comply with the JFTC's rulings, but declined to acknowledge wrongdoing. On 27th June AMD filed a 48-page antitrust suit in a US Federal Court, packed with allegations of unlawful Intel tactics. AMD accused Intel of using rebates, discounts and marketing funds amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars illegally to lock PC makers and resellers into exclusive contracts with Intel.

For example, AMD claims that in 2002 HP told its executives that it could use a certain line of AMD chips only if AMD paid the PC vendor \$25 million (around £14m) per quarter, as compensation for the financial impact of Intel's retaliation.

It is believed that developments in Japan and AMD's new evidence encouraged the EC to re-open its investigation into Intel. Intel CEO Paul Otellini acknowledged that the company competes "aggressively", adding, however, that "Intel has always respected the laws of countries in which we operate".

SCO's anti-Linux campaign on shaky ground

The whole basis of SCO's legal onslaught against Linux and the open-source movement could be groundless, according to an internal SCO email written in 2002, which has just been uncovered.

In a 2003 keynote address at the Computer Digital Expo in Las Vegas, SCO boss Darl McBride revealed plans to launch a broadside against Linux. "For the last several months, we have consistently stated and maintained that our System V UNIX code is in Linux," he said.

"The claims SCO has are both broad and deep. These claims touch not just IBM but other vendors as well. They also touch certain industry consortia and corporate Linux end-users. Our claims aren't trivial. The

violations of our intellectual property are not easily repaired. It is our intention to vigorously protect and enforce SCO's intellectual property, System V source code and our copyrights. We're now fully prepared to do that," he threatened.

Subsequently, SCO sued IBM for more than \$1 billion (around £566m) and several large users including DaimlerChrysler. SCO alleged that IBM had unlawfully used SCO code, which it claimed was contained in Linux.

However, on 13th August 2002 McBride received an email from SCO engineer Michael Davidson that dismissed the likelihood that any SCO-owned code was present in Linux. Davidson's email concluded

that, "at the end, we had found absolutely nothing, ie no evidence of any copyright infringement whatsoever". The email was leaked in July to the legal website Groklaw.

SCO denies that the leaked email damages its case. "That email probably creates a lot more questions than it answers. We'll be fully prepared to address that, but we will be doing that in a court setting if it is necessary," said an SCO spokesman.

US district judge Dale Kimball lambasted the company in February, saying, "it is astonishing that SCO has not offered any competent evidence to create a disputed fact regarding whether IBM has infringed SCO's alleged copyrights through IBM's Linux activities".

NEWS

BRIEF

UK HACKER FIGHTS US EXTRADITION

A British man described as the "world's biggest hacker" is fighting an attempt to extradite him to the US, where he faces charges of hacking military computers.

Gary McKinnon, 39, allegedly broke into 97 US government computers and caused \$700,000 (about £396,000) worth of damage. He is accused of deleting files and logs at a US Navy base, leaving its 300 plus computers inoperable.

Mark Summers, a lawyer for the US government, said the hacking was "intentional and calculated to influence and affect the US government by intimidation and coercion."

HOLLYWOOD AGREES ON DIGITAL STANDARDS

Hollywood movie studios have agreed which technology standards to use for digital movies. The standards cover 2K and 4K resolutions, which provide very sharp pictures, and include specifications for compression, packaging and copy protection.

The first widespread installations are expected in 2006 and 2007. Now the studios have to meet cinema owners and agree who will pay for the installation of the new digital projectors. Cinema owners argue that as studios will enjoy large cost savings on distribution, which will be as much as 75 per cent cheaper than sending out physical film, they should pay for the cost of conversion. Studios would prefer to share the expense.

WAITROSE LAUNCHES CHARITY ISP

Supermarket chain Waitrose has launched a 2Mbit/s broadband service. What makes the John Lewis-owned chain's offering different is that all the profits go to charity.

The service costs £18.99 per month and includes a free modem and no activation fee, which amounts to a saving of around £80. As an incentive to existing broadband users, for whom a free modem is pointless, Waitrose is throwing in three months' free rental worth just under £57.

Proceeds go to the Prince's Trust, Macmillan Cancer Relief, the British Heart Foundation and the British Red Cross.



NEWS

BRIEF

■ FILE SWAPPERS ARE BIGGEST SPENDERS

Music fans who share songs illegally are also the biggest spenders when it comes to buying digital music. A new report says that they spend four and a half times more on music downloads from online stores than people who don't use peer-to-peer (P2P) software to download MP3s.

Music research group The Leading Question found that although file sharers spend less on CDs, they spend an average of £5.52 each month on downloads. In contrast, P2P abstainers spend just £1.27 per month.

■ RUSSIAN SPAM KING BLUDGEONED TO DEATH

A notorious Russian spammer has been found beaten to death in his Moscow apartment. Russia's 14 million internet users are said to have greeted the news of Vardan Kushnir's demise with "thinly veiled jubilation", after he spent years stuffing their inboxes with advertisements for his American Language Center.

Moscow police said he was hit several times on the head with a heavy object and his apartment ransacked. They ruled out revenge by an overburdened email user or a contract killing, explaining that Kushnir met two girls at a nightclub and invited them back to his flat where they drugged him. Detectives speculated that he woke as his flat was being robbed and was killed.

■ MAN FINED FOR BANDWIDTH THEFT

In a landmark ruling, a UK court has fined a man £500 for logging on to a domestic WiFi network without permission. A jury in Isleworth found Gregory Straszkiwicz guilty of dishonestly obtaining an electronics communication service and possessing equipment for fraudulent use of a communications service. In addition to his fine he was given a year's probation.

Straszkiwicz was caught by police outside a private building with his wireless-enabled laptop, having tried to connect to the network several times before he was arrested. The police said it was the first UK prosecution for war driving, which is the name given to the practice of locating and tapping into unsecured wireless networks.

UN clashes with US over internet's future

The United Nations (UN) is considering whether the International Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) should retain its role as the lead technical body for the internet. At stake is whether the US or the UN is in charge of the nuts and bolts of the internet, holding control over top-level domain names. The end result may determine whether the internet will survive as a single, compatible network.

While ICANN is now an autonomous, non-government, non-profit organisation, it was released from US government control only in 2004. The US government's role in determining internet standards derives from its key role in developing the internet as an offshoot of its defence-related Arpanet project.

In July a UN body called the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) issued a report that called for at least a partial overhaul of how the internet is run and who is responsible for key decisions. The WGIG report proposed four possible models for running the

internet, ranging from leaving things more or less as they are to the United Nations running things.

The report recommended that no single country should have a pre-eminent role in international internet governance. This put the UN directly at odds with the US government, which is determined to retain control over the root server containing the internet's top-level domains. This in turn prevents ICANN becoming an independent international body.

There are reports that countries including China and Brazil are threatening to fragment the internet root domain as a protest against

US control. This would mean that domains not recognised by ICANN could be used and recognised in other parts of the world. Ultimately the internet's biggest strength is its universality, but this could be destroyed in a battle between governments over who controls it.

The UN-backed Second World Summit on the Information Society to be held in Tunis in November 2005 will ask national delegates to select one of the four WGIG proposals. "In the end it will be up to governments, if at all, to decide if there will be any change," said Markus Kummer, WGIG executive director.



European Parliament rejects software patents

The European Parliament has thrown out a highly controversial proposal to recognise software patents by an overwhelming 648 votes to 14.

The Computer Implemented Inventions Directive was strongly backed by large computer companies including Nokia, Siemens, Microsoft and IBM. If voted in, the directive would have provided an EU-wide patent protection system for computerised inventions including, most controversially, software.

The companies claimed that the patent directive would guard innovation and encourage research and development. Open-source activists and some consumer groups condemned the directive as a device for large software corporations to attack new and

smaller developers and the open-source community, locking them out of the market with the threat of trivial patent lawsuits.

"Under the influence of the patent system and big industry lobbyists, the European Union is on the verge of making a huge mistake: to pass a law that would legalise software patents. If that happens, you will pay dearly," warned NoSoftwarePatents.com, an anti-patent law pressure group, before the decision.

"Europe's software industry will fall victim to unscrupulous extortionists. A cartel of large corporations will crush smaller competitors. Consequently, we will all pay more money for less good and less secure software. You personally,

your household, your company, your government, all of us," it said.

Earlier this year, over the objections of the European Parliament and some member states including Poland, Denmark and Portugal, the European Council of Ministers approved the Computer Implemented Inventions Directive. It was also made an 'A-Point' Directive, making it very difficult for the European Parliament to derail it during its final reading. But it did reject it.

"Patents will continue to be handled by national patent offices as before, which means different interpretations as to what is patentable, without any judiciary control by the European Court of Justice," said EU external relations commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner.



Apple video iPod looks likely

Apple has been negotiating with record companies over its plans to sell music videos through the iTunes Music Store, a move that has intensified long-standing rumours that the company will launch a video iPod.

Recent upgrades to iTunes mean it can play videos, although Apple has not highlighted this capability. Apple could easily expand the iTunes Music Store to offer downloads of movies if it wanted to, but there are believed to be significant business obstacles. Hollywood is not keen to follow the music industry and give up control of electronic distribution of its product to an outsider such as Apple. On the other hand, the advent of file-swapping technologies such as BitTorrent has introduced widespread sharing of movies and TV programmes over the internet, meaning that the industry is increasingly desperate to develop a viable legal alternative.

The success of the iTunes Music Store, which has sold more than 500

million music downloads in two years, has not escaped the movie industry, which will pay close attention to Apple's negotiations to sell music videos. According to the *Wall Street Journal* the music industry is keen to create a means of earning extra cash to offset the costs of expensive promotional videos, and might agree to selling videos over iTunes as soon as this September for about \$1.99 (around £1.13) each. Record companies are still upset over their blunder 20 years ago in letting MTV pay virtually nothing to show music videos, and they have already reached agreements with both Yahoo! and AOL to stream paid-for music videos over the web.

Steve Jobs has consistently rubbished the idea that people want to watch movies on portable video players. However, industry observers point out that he was similarly dismissive of flash-based music players before Apple launched the iPod shuffle.

In a conference call to Pixar investors and analysts, Jobs admitted that his animation company had discussed making versions of its movies available for portable video players. "So far there really hasn't been a successful portable video device other than those that play industry-standard DVDs, and that we participate in just because we sell DVDs. So who knows what's down the road," said Jobs during the call.

So far Jobs's scepticism has been well founded, considering the poor sales of video players from Creative and Samsung. But just as Apple arrived late in the music player market with the iPod and managed to dominate it, many analysts believe it could do the same for video devices. "I believe a video iPod is inevitable," said US analyst Richard Doherty of the Envisioneering Group. "It's a big hole and an obvious one in Apple's line-up," agreed Roger Kay of Endpoint Technologies Associates, a technology analyst outfit.

Sasser worm creator escapes jail sentence

Sven Jaschan, the German teenager who created the Sasser worm, a virus that was responsible for over half of all computer infections during 2004, escaped jail after the German courts handed him a suspended sentence of a year and nine months. Under German law he faced a maximum of up to five years in prison after causing millions of pounds of damage worldwide.

The sentence was lenient despite the emergence of evidence that Jaschan had updated Sasser, even after he witnessed the devastation it was wreaking on computers around the world. Victims included the European Commission, the British Coastguard and Goldman Sachs.

"Jaschan's worms caused considerable damage, but [his crime] was committed when he was still a junior. Some who have to defend computer systems against worms may feel frustrated that the sentence isn't stronger, but it has to be remembered that he was a young kid who did something immensely dumb, rather than one of the organised crime gangs intent on stealing money via viruses that we are now commonly encountering," said Graham Cluley, senior technology consultant at anti-virus firm Sophos.

Jaschan even escaped a fine, although he must undertake 30 hours of community service in a hospital or home for the elderly.

This was enough to prompt *New York Times* columnist John Tierney to propose that Jaschan at least serve some kind of suitably humiliating community service. "Make the hacker spend 16 hours a day fielding help-desk enquiries in an AOL chatroom for computer novices. Force him to do this with a username at least as uncool as KoolDude and to work on a vintage IBM PC with a 2400-baud dial-up connection. Most painful of all for any geek, make him use Windows 95 for the rest of his life."

Jaschan has instead walked into a job with German IT security company Securepoint, which specialises in anti-virus work.

NEWS

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■ HP PULLS OUT OF IPOD PARTNERSHIP

HP will no longer sell iPods.

The world's number two PC manufacturer was responsible for around five per cent of total iPod sales, which met the company's expectations but is not thought to have generated much profit from a deal that was weighted heavily in Apple's favour, according to the *Wall Street Journal*. An Apple spokeswoman said that the partnership had been terminated because HP "decided that reselling iPods doesn't fit with the company's digital media strategy".

■ ANTI-PIRACY MEASURE CRACKED IN 24 HOURS

There were some red faces at Microsoft following the discovery that its much-vaunted Windows Advantage program could be defeated with a simple piece of JavaScript. The code appeared on a number of websites within 24 hours of Windows Advantage going live. The system, which was officially launched after months of testing, is intended to weed out bootleg copies of Windows from official ones.

The code stops the Windows Advantage checker being installed. Microsoft has emphasised that the JavaScript poses no security threat and does not put customers at risk. Nevertheless, the company moved quickly to fix the problem and the code no longer works.

■ VIRUS AUTHOR THREATENS SEQUELS

A virus author has threatened that future versions of his handiwork will prove even more deadly. The latest version of the Lebreath worm has a message within its code that lambasts rivals and promises that the author will fine-tune the worm to make it even more effective.

The author says he will introduce a new engine into the virus, which has already seen multiple variants in its relatively short lifetime. The virus also criticises Sven Jaschan, the German teen found guilty of authoring the NetSky and Sasser worms (see left), and drops a picture of Jaschan on the victim's hard disk.



NEWS

BRIEF

■ JAPAN PLANS NEW SUPERCOMPUTER

Japan is planning to build a new supercomputer that will perform a staggering 73 times faster than the current top cluster, the IBM Blue Gene. According to the country's Education and Science Ministry, the prospective machine will be capable of processing 10 quadrillion instructions each second (10 petaflops) as opposed to the 137 teraflops of Blue Gene. Scientists intend to use the supercomputer to track climate change, simulate the formation of the galaxy and measure human reactions to new drugs.

However, all that power is a long way from completion, which is scheduled for March 2011. It should ultimately enable Japan to reclaim the top supercomputer spot that, until recently, was occupied by the Earth Simulator in Yokohama. Now the top three computers are all located in the US.

■ QUANTUM LEAP FOR COMPUTER POWER

Two Swiss scientists have made a theoretical breakthrough that could bring the age of quantum computing a step nearer. Hans-Andreas Engel and Daniel Loss of the University of Basel in Switzerland have explained how to make a device called a spin-parity meter, quantum computing's equivalent of the transistor. Although they have worked out how to build one, they have not yet got as far as putting it together.

Quantum computers substitute information encoded using the magnetic state (the spins) of electrons for the binary zeros and ones of conventional processors. Because pairs of electrons can be a mixture of spin combinations, a quantum computer is capable of encoding information in many more states, making it much more powerful.

Engel and Loss have shown that it is possible to measure the spins of electrons without disturbing them. Their work looks at how computing can be performed by mapping data as it spreads through a network of components, and is designed to avoid pitfalls in earlier quantum computing theories that treated data in a more conventional, circuit-based way.

Data at your fingertips

Japanese scientists have used lasers to carve microscopic numbers and pictures on human fingernails. Rather than some form of torture or fetishistic body adornment, though, it's actually part of their research into new ways of combating identity theft.

Researchers at the University of Tokushima believe that a single fingernail could store up to 800KB of information, which would be sufficient to include encrypted personal ID data such as that found on credit cards and driving licences.

The data is encoded using short pulses of infrared laser light, which seems to affect keratin molecules in the nail and makes them more fluorescent under blue laser light. A pattern can be read back as a series of bright dots under a microscope. The researchers say it is even possible to write several layers of data on a single nail by changing the depth of the writing laser's focal spot.



This ingenious technology is not without problems, some of which are obvious. Nails grow continuously and are invariably snagged and bitten. Researchers acknowledged that the information would need to be re-entered on the nail at least every six months.

What's more, if a fingernail gets too warm the heat can affect keratin molecules and corrupt the data. Keeping the human hand still enough not to render the data

input meaningless is also a problem. So far the Japanese team has used only fingernail clippings, but it claims to be working on software that can compensate for involuntary finger movements.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to using the technology as a kind of biometric ID is that it won't be particularly secure. "It would be very simple to forge the information. You wouldn't need a lot of technology to

do that," said Peter Török, an optical data storage specialist at Imperial College London.

Looking for likely uses for the technology, the science journal *Nature* suggested that, "the system would be of more use to people who want to surreptitiously move information from one place to another. So although credit cards are unlikely to be replaced any time soon, spies and government agents may prove customers for this technology."

Sharp introduces dual-view LCD

Sharp is producing a dual-view LCD screen that displays two different images depending on the angle it is viewed from. Sharp says it is focusing on LCD screens for vehicle navigation systems, but in time it plans to produce dual-display televisions.

"Dual-view displays will change the lifestyle," said Sharp's director for LCD products, Mikio Katayama. "One family can sit together in a living room and enjoy different TV programmes. The dual-view display TV solves the

TV channel squabble." Presumably the family will also need headphones.

Sharp's dual-view screen uses the 'switching LCD' it pioneered in its 3D LCDs. Switching LCDs have a 'parallax barrier' that sends light from each pixel in two different directions. For 3D viewing, the angle between each path is just six degrees, which is enough for slightly different images to enter each eye to create a 3D effect.

With the new displays, the angle between each light path is 40°, and

each image can be entirely different, so two viewers can see different images depending on where they sit. The parallax barrier can be turned off so that the display functions as a standard LCD monitor.

Katayama said Sharp hopes to sell the screens for less than the price of two displays but more than a standard screen. The car navigation systems will allow the driver to see a map while passengers enjoy a movie on the same display.

Champions League webcasts

UEFA has instructed all TV companies that broadcast Champions League matches to stream them as simultaneous live webcasts from the 2006-7 season onwards.

So far UEFA has allowed football clubs to show highlights and repeats of their own Champions League games online, but not live broadcasts.

The decision is designed to expand the total viewing figures and

raise revenues by offering access to consumers around the world who may not be able to view the games on cable or terrestrial broadcasts.

UEFA tied broadcast and internet rights together to allay broadcasters' fears that they could lose viewers to the web. TV-quality webcasts are expected to grow in popularity as broadband access expands and consumers replace old analogue

equipment with digital hub-style home entertainment systems.

Another challenge for broadcasters will be to make sure their internet broadcasts are available only in the countries for which they have the rights. Last summer the BBC streamed coverage of the Athens Olympics on its website and used an IP identifier to stop people outside the UK watching the content.